



Transition

Best Practice Update

Preparing Students with Disabilities for College

This is the second in a four-part series of *Transition Best Practice Updates* (January – April 2001) focusing on preparing students with disabilities for post- secondary academic settings.

North Dakota is a state that has many post secondary options for all students—with or without disabilities. Each type of post-secondary education and training setting offers different programs and courses to meet the great variety of career goals. Potential post-secondary students should learn about programs in their interest area and types of services available to meet their needs. A careful review of the information collected about a student's strengths and limitations will also help students decide whether a particular program is suited to their future goals. This information may be gained from high school guidance counselors, vocational education teachers, work experience coordinators or counselors from Vocational Rehabilitation.

Technical Colleges

Technical colleges offer students opportunities to receive training in a specific occupational area with employment as the training goal. These programs are often reflective of an actual workplace with vocational skills and behavior monitored closely (i.e. attendance, punctuality, self-improvement, attitudes and independence). Programs vary in length from a few months to two years. Students who successfully complete a program may earn an Associate of Applied Science Degree, or a specific certification or license, depending on the program.

Colleges and Universities

College and university students usually intend to pursue a professional career. Potential students may have a specific career goal or an idea about their career direction. In either situation, it is important for potential students to review and evaluate all aspects of the colleges and universities that offer degrees in their interest areas.

College and universities offer several types of programs. Universities are usually quite large and offer undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs. Colleges are typically smaller and focus more on undergraduate training. Tuition varies greatly, with public institutions costing less. Private colleges have admission standards that vary. Acceptance is based on a combination of performance in high school, ACT scores and often a written essay and/or letter of recommendation.

A high school counselor or teacher who is familiar with college and university planning should be consulted to help individuals collect information about admission. Once individuals have chosen the colleges or universities to which they want to apply, preparation for admission should begin. High school courses should emphasize academic and liberal arts areas. Some students with disabilities may need accommodation in these courses while in high school to maximize their level of participation and success.

Prearranged accommodations can be made for students with disabilities who register for the American College Testing Assessment (ACT) with proof of disability and need for accommodations verified. Accommodations may include increased time to take the test, having the test taped, assistance with marking answers and large-type test materials.

Community Colleges

Community colleges offer programs that culminate with either a certificate or an Associate of Arts degree. These programs often provide liberal arts programs, giving students the opportunity to eventually complete a four-year degree at a college or university. Students can complete the first two years of most majors and transfer with a junior status to the majority of four-year colleges and universities throughout the country. Many community colleges now include vocational and occupational skills programs that lead directly to a job. They offer a wide variety of services for students with disabilities. Admission is open to anyone who has earned a high school diploma or GED certificate. Some programs require additional qualifications or prerequisites because of specialized content, and some may have enrollment limits.

North Dakota Job Corps

The Quentin Burdick Job Corps Center located in Minot, North Dakota, is a residential education and job training program for young adults ages 16 to 24. The Quentin Job Corps Center is one of the 108 Job Corps sites in the United States. Persons with a high school diploma or a GED who are enrolled in Job Corps can upgrade their basic skills in reading, writing, and math. Improving these skills increase opportunities for employment. Young adults who have dropped out of high school may earn their high school diploma while in Job Corps.

The Quentin Burdick Job Corps Center offers vocational preparation in the following areas:

- Carpentry
- Health occupations
- Business office and clerical skills/medical secretary
- Building and apartment maintenance

- Culinary arts
- Auto and farm implement repair
- Auto and farm machinery parts, sales, and marketing
- Advanced career training at Minot State University

If Job Corps participants want job training that is not available at their center, arrangements can be made for them to transfer to another site that offers the training. This transfer can be made after initial training is completed.

Because the Job Corps is a residential program, room, board, and recreation programs are provided on site. Students also have access to medical, dental, and mental health services. The Job Corps center is a highly disciplined learning environment. Student allowances and incentive payments are frequently tied to accomplishment of goals.

The Quentin Burdick Job Corps Center includes programs especially for single parents who live on campus with their children. Day care and child development, as well as other support programs are provided for these parents while they get the education and job training they need to find a job that will support them and their children.

Other Post-Secondary Education and Training Options

There are several education and training options available to individuals whose career goals do not fit within the confines of programs offered at technical colleges, colleges, or universities. Programs to explore include community education, apprenticeship and military service. Students should be encouraged to collect information about several programs. Personal interviews and on-site visits are highly recommended. For some individuals with disabilities, creative programs can be collectively designed with the assistance of their transition team, other family, and community members. For example, a specialized vocational training program may be an appropriate choice for individuals who have chosen careers that require more focused, specialized training. These programs may include careers in cosmetology, business, electronics, sales, paralegal services, health care services and others. Many of these programs are offered through private schools that are accredited and licensed by the specific professional associates responsible for monitoring and training. Most of the instructors have direct experience in the field and can offer invaluable insight and advice, with on-the-job training available.

VISITING THE COLLEGE CAMPUS

The best way to get a realistic idea of a college is by personal visit with parents. Typical campus visits include tours of the grounds, residence halls and classrooms, visits with academic advisors, administration and faculty. It is best to contact the Admissions Office at least two weeks in advance of a visit to verify requirements and arrange for a tour at a time when it is feasible to observe classrooms in session, visit instructors, view housing at a convenient time, and other special requests or interests.

Before any college campus tours:

- Review the college catalog and calendar to find a time to visit (never during the summer or finals!).
- Call the admissions officer to make an appointment for the visit.
- Allow 2 days, if possible to get a realistic view of the college and campus life; try to arrange to stay overnight in a dormitory or a local motel to get an idea of what campus life is like during the evening.
- Plan to spend some time with the financial aid office.
- Plan to spend some time with the disability support service office.
- Be familiar with the program of study you are interested in.
- Make a list of questions for the various people you will talk with.
- Know the population of the campus and community.

During the college campus tour:

- Tour at least two residence halls and dining rooms, the library, computer lab, observe a minimum of two classes in walk through the campus and student union/student center, and drive through the community.
- Read a campus newspaper.
- Visit the faculty of the department or program of the proposed major.
- Visit the disability support service office and staff.
- Request financial aid information and deadline dates for enrollment.
- Ask about transportation options around the campus and community.
- Talk with students about their overall feelings of the college; arrange to visit with someone who is pursuing a similar career goal and discuss classes and study time.
- Inquire about campus and community activities such as clubs, fraternities, sororities, organizations, intramural sports, etc.
- Keep notes to review with your parents at a later date.

After the college campus tour:

- Review your notes with your parents and case manager/guidance counselor; make a chart of comparisons between the colleges you have visited.
- If appropriate, send a thank you to the admissions counselor who arranged your visit and perhaps the disability service office.

Housing

Depending on the post-secondary education setting a student chooses, there are a number of factors, which may influence choice for living arrangements. Most colleges and universities offer on campus housing, but depending on a student's disability, there are several factors that require attention. For instance, if a student has a hearing impairment, accommodations might include accessibility to a text telephone and the dormitory fire alarm system.

Upon acceptance to a post-secondary institution, students should contact the disability support services office to inquire about housing options both on campus and within the community. As part of the ADA and Section 504, all educational institutions that offer on campus living must accommodate students with disabilities at a charge no more than is charged for a standard room. The process for securing accessible housing needs to be addressed as soon as possible upon acceptance. The following identify some questions to be addressed if housing needs are required:

- Determine what auxiliary aids and services are offered by the institution to make housing services accessible to people with disabilities;
- Determine if common areas (lounges, cafeterias, laundry facilities) are accessible;
- Review the institutions policy regarding students with disabilities who require the services of a personal care attendant;
- Housing brochures should be available in alternative formats (tape, Braille, large print);
- How will the institution accommodate service animals in a dormitory setting;
- Alarm systems in housing and dormitories must be ADA compliant;
- Accommodations must be available if a student with a disability is interested in sororities or fraternities.

If accessibility will be an issue for you to address, consider the following during your campus visit:

Accessible sidewalks	Bathrooms	Public transportation	Parking
Alarms	Curb ramps	Doors	Stairs
Telephones	Elevators	Entrances	Common areas

The Fair Housing Act Amendments of 1988 mandate that housing providers must provide “reasonable accommodations” for people with disabilities. This includes changes in rules, policies, practices or services that would allow a person with a disability equal choice in dwelling selection and equal chance to enjoy that dwelling (Montana, 1997).

CHOOSING THE RIGHT SCHOOL FOR YOU

Selecting a university or two-year school will undoubtedly be one of the most difficult and important choices that you will ever have to make. In the United States, there are over 3,000 universities and colleges to choose from, but you cannot apply to all of them. College applications usually require an application fee, so narrow down your list to approximately five schools to keep these costs to a minimum. The following guidelines may help you narrow down your top five list.

- Examine the admissions requirements of each school that you are interested in carefully to determine which offer the most realistic opportunities for gaining admission.

- Tuition costs vary between public and private schools, and from state to state. Many students are also subject to a special "out of state" tuition (which can be double the normal tuition). In addition, room and board costs have been on the rise for the last several years. All of these factors should be considered. Establish as early as possible the degree to which your family is willing to sacrifice (total parental contribution) to send you to school. This will give you time to see what types of financial aid you may be eligible for.
- Look for universities that are known for their excellence in the field that interests you if you have an idea of what career you wish to pursue after graduation. When comparing the merits of different schools, be sure to examine the caliber of the faculty, average class size in upper division courses, its academic reputation, and finally, the facilities. Visiting the prospective campus can be the most decisive factor in your choice of a school.

REASONS NOT TO CHOOSE A COLLEGE

To be with your boyfriend or girlfriend.

To be with your best friend.

The college is close to the seashore or ski slopes.

Lots of attractive people.

Your counselor/parent/friend says you should go.

It's too far for your parents to come visit unexpectedly for the weekend.

It's where everyone in the family attended.

Name recognition—it's an impressive college and everyone knows of it.

The college has a reputation for a wild social life and parties.

(New Jersey, 1998)